BEST BUY

Shining stars of 2012

We feature a sparkling selection of Best Buy products that stood out from the crowd this year

The Which? test lab has been buzzing this year. During 2012 we put more than 2,500 products through their paces to help Which? members choose the very best – and avoid the worst.

We test a huge range of products – from mobile phones to laptops, food processors to washing machines, ebook readers to satnavs and cameras to walking boots – and only those that excel in our rigorous tests are awarded coveted Best Buy status.

We're continuously improving our tests – in response to your feedback and requests, for example. This year, we tested water dispensers for the first time and reintroduced sound bar and speaker dock tests.

In the following pages we highlight the very best, most innovative Best Buys of 2012 and those that have stood the test of time, to help you in your quest for the perfect Christmas gift. Or, if you've been extra good this year, why not treat yourself to a quality bargain in the New Year sales?

PHOTOGRAPHY BY: EUGENIO FRANCHI

Portable tech

SMARTPHONE

iPhone 5 From £529 Sim-free

Which? test score 90%

The recently launched iPhone 5 is the best phone we've ever tested. Sound quality on calls is the finest we've heard on an iPhone, and the larger screen is better for videos and makes apps easier to use. It's slimmer and lighter, yet built exceptionally well.

We have a few gripes, including Apple's inferior map app and a smaller dock connection that requires an adaptor (£25) to work with existing docks and accessories. It's very expensive on PAYG, too, but overall it's another outstanding phone from Apple.

SMARTPHONE

Samsung Galaxy SIII £450 PAYG

Which? test score 83%

If you don't want an iPhone, this is your next best bet. It takes great photos and videos that look fab on the bright and colourful 4.8-inch screen. Battery life is the best we've tested and more than double that of most smartphones. It may be a bit big and pricey for some, though.

BASIC PHONE

Doro PhoneEasy 610 £85 Sim-free

Which? test score 75%

This is a large, no-frills phone with a 'clamshell' design – perfect for those who just want to make calls. There's no camera or fancy features but it's simple to use and has large, well-spaced buttons that are clear to read. The menu structure is simple and well laid-out. It has an extra loud ringer and is also hearing-aid compatible.

TABLET

Apple iPad (16GB, wi-fi) £399

Which? test score 79%

The latest iPad is the highest scoring tablet we've tested. It's a dream to use, and the super-sharp 'retina' screen looks fantastic. Battery life is excellent and the camera's good, but lacks a flash. See p50 for the full review.

EBOOK READER

Kindle Paperwhite £109

Which? test score 72%

With a built-in adjustable light, this Kindle is the best model we've tested for reading in dim light. It has wi-fi, a web browser, and the 'Time to Read' feature calculates when you'll finish your chapter. It can't play music or audio books, and the 3G version (£169) is pricey.

LAPTOP

Apple MacBook Air 11-inch, 64GB £849

Which? test score 83%

Beautifully designed, the Air's superior build and aluminium casing makes it very robust yet ultra light. It's fast and responsive with a fabulous screen and well-designed keyboard. More on p56.

SATNAV

TomTom Via 130 £130

Which? test score 69%

With simple, timely instructions and clear maps this satnav should get you to your destination stress-free. It's easy to use and responds to voice commands. It has UK/Ireland maps, while a European version costs £150.

HEADPHONES

Grado Prestige Series SR80i £135

Which? test score 82%

These on-ear, wired headphones are exceptionally comfortable and sound great. Clarity and detail is excellent but there is some sound leakage, so you may need to turn the volume down if you're using them in a quiet public place.

All prices given here are the lowest widely available prices.

TEST LAB ROUND-UP OF THE YEAR

The best of the best of TV and audio, plus 2012's stars for photos, video and printing

TV and audio

TV, 37-INCH

LG 37LS570T £459

Which? test score 70%

If you're looking for a feature-packed 37-inch TV, then this LG should definitely be on your Christmas list. Slimline and stylish, this LED TV has a Full-HD screen, Freeview HD tuner and a great range of internet features, including catch-up TV from BBC iPlayer.

It's one of the best 37-inch models we've tested and we've given it our Energy Saver award for its low energy consumption. Picture quality is impressive for both SD and HD but sound quality is disappointing, so you might want to pair it with the LG sound bar (see right). The only serious drawbacks are slightly cluttered menus, particularly when accessing internet features.

TV, 22-INCH

Samsung UE22ES5400 £230

Which? test score 66%

Unlike other TVs of a similar size, this 22-inch Samsung has built-in wi-fi to access smart TV features such as apps for BBC iPlayer and Netflix. Picture quality is good and the TV is simple to use, but sound quality isn't great.

TV, 47-INCH

LG 47LM860V £1,300

Which? test score 75%

A premium 47-inch TV with a stunning, almost frameless design. HD pictures look great and sound is very good. It's got all the latest internet TV features, including catch-up TV and on-demand films, and the motion-sensitive Magic Remote makes them easier to use.

SPEAKER DOCK

Kitsound Boom Dock £89

Which? test score 86%

This dock accommodates most iPods and iPhones (pre-iPhone 5) and has a useful alarm clock plus AM/FM radio. Sound quality is impressive, even at high volume, and beats that of other more expensive docks. It's mains-only but the remote control is a handy extra.

DIGITAL RADIO

Roberts Ecologic 4 £90

Which? test score 66%

This portable DAB/FM digital radio has good sound quality with treble and bass controls. You can store up to 10 DAB and 10 FM stations as presets. However, the clock isn't displayed on standby and there's no alarm or sleep timer, ruling it out as a bedside clock radio.

SOUND BAR

LG NB2520A £190

Which? test score 80%

This space-saving sound bar has a built-in subwoofer that will boost the sound from your TV and connected devices. It sounds great, is easy to use and won't hike up your electricity bill.

PVR

Echostar HDT-610R £220

Which? test score 78%

This high-definition PVR has a large 500GB hard drive for up to 100 hours of HD programme recording. The SlingLoaded feature lets you watch TV via your PC, Mac or any other compatible mobile device.

STREAMING SET-TOP BOX

Roku LT £50

Which? test score 71%

This tiny box transforms your standard TV into a smart TV and is simple to set up and operate. It uses wi-fi to stream content from home computing devices, as well as internet content from the likes of Netflix and BBC iPlayer.

Photo and video

DSLR CAMERA

Canon 650D £614

Which? test score 82%

The 650D is an excellent DSLR offering a wide range of features for its price. It's quick to start up – ideal for capturing spontaneous moments. It has an 18Mp resolution and takes great photos in all conditions, although automatic settings for indoor flash-free shots could be improved. It shoots decent HD video footage, too. For more camera reviews, see p42.

DSLR CAMERA

Sony Alpha A57 £500

Which? test score 83%

A good entry-level all-rounder with an ample 16Mp resolution. It produces good-quality photos and videos. It's faster than average and has a versatile tilting touchscreen, so you can take shots from different angles.

COMPACT SYSTEM CAMERA

Samsung NX20 £900

Which? test score 81%

A fantastic high-end camera that would suit keen amateurs and enthusiasts alike. It takes superb pictures, capturing an impressive eight per second. Wi-fi lets you send your photos directly to other devices.

PREMIUM COMPACT CAMERA

Olympus SZ-31MR £250

Which? test score 76%

An impressive compact, with a 24x optical zoom, it takes fantastic photos (although quality is reduced slightly at full zoom). It has a fast shutter and is quick to refocus for multiple shots. Close-up shots are good, too.

BRIDGE CAMERA

Fujifilm FinePix X-S1 £479

Which? test score 75%

This powerful bridge camera has 12Mp and an impressive 26x optical zoom. It has a good wide-angle lens and takes great pictures, even in low light. On the downside, it is quite bulky and heavy.

ALL-IN-ONE PRINTER

Canon Pixma MX895 £180

Which? test score 70%

If you want a versatile all-in-one printer for less than £150, this is a fantastic option. Mono prints are sharper than most inkjets – although above average in cost – and it scans and copies well. It's speedy at printing text and photos.

HD CAMCORDER

Panasonic HC-X800 £524

Which? test score 82%

This fantastic little camcorder shoots sharp footage – even in low light – and great 16Mp photos, too. Images look good and are easy to manage on the large touchscreen. It has an impressive 12x optical zoom and the autofocus is fast and precise.

CHEAP COMPACT CAMERA

Panasonic Lumix DMC-FS45 £120

Which? test score 71%

Small enough to fit in a pocket, this is a decent all-round 'point-and-shoot' camera. Photo and video quality are both impressive and shots are quick, although it has few manual features.

Food gadgets

HAND BLENDER
Kenwood HB724 £69
Which? test score 76%
This Kenwood blender really impressed our experts. It comes with a huge range of accessories and performs well in all tasks. It chops evenly, blends superbly, and is outstanding when used in whisk mode. It's also easy to clean when you've finished.

JUG BLENDER
Philips HR2094 £80
Which? test score 81%
A long-standing favourite, this stylish jug blender has a sleek silver finish and illuminated buttons. The chunky glass jug is durable but heavy, with a useful straining lid. It has a variety of settings, including ice crushing, and handles all tasks with ease.

JUICER
Philips HR1861 £100
Which? test score 75%
This machine is one of the best for making fruit juice and serves up a decent vegetable juice, too. It has a two-speed motor for both soft and hard fruits, and the large chute takes whole items without chopping. It's easy to use and clean.

HAND MIXER
Kenwood kMix HM791 £48
Which? test score 75%
The kMix beats, whisks, whips and kneads, performing tasks quietly and efficiently. It has five speeds and is available in a variety of colours with other kMix appliances to match. Most of the accessories are dishwasher safe, making it easy to clean, and it has a useful storage stand. It's comfortable to grip and, although it's quite heavy, it stands safely upright should you need to rest mid-mix.

FOOD PROCESSOR
Bosch MCM4100GB £84
Which? test score 77%
This is a good quality multitasker if you're looking for an all-in-one machine. It chops, grinds, grates and slices well. Soups, juices and smoothies are fantastic and it can knead dough and purée food.

MINI CHOPPER
Magimix Le Micro £60
Which? test score 81%
Le Micro is excellent at chopping, puréeing and making mayonnaise. It's easy to assemble, use and clean, although it's noisy and a bit bigger than other mini choppers. It comes with some great recipes.

STAND MIXER/KITCHEN MACHINE
Bosch MUM52120GB Styline £200
Which? test score 77%
This compact and stylish Bosch is cheaper and lighter than many traditional machines. It's excellent at whisking, whipping, mixing and kneading.

BREADMAKER
Panasonic SD-2501 £140
Which? test score 73%
Programmes are long but loaves are consistently good and worth the wait. The automatic fruit and nut dispenser is good for speciality breads. It's quiet and easy to use.

Pick the right coffee machine
For more coffee machine reviews, see p60. Also, use our interactive tool at www.which.co.uk/coffeetool to explore different coffee machine features and pick the right one for you.

Everyday kitchen

SLOW COOKER

Lakeland 13662 £20

Which? test score 77%

Lakeland's slow cooker isn't big enough for a whole chicken or large pieces of meat, but it's perfect for a meal for two. It makes rich, smooth sauces on both the low and high settings. It's easy to use and the auto setting cooks on high then switches to keep warm.

STEAMER

Logik L90SSS11 £25

Which? test score 84%

This three-tiered steamer is one of the best we've ever tested and cooks meat, fish, vegetables and rice with equally good results. It's spacious, quick and easy to use. It's a pleasant surprise for an own-brand (Currys) such as this to beat more expensive models.

FRYER

De'Longhi PremiumFry F34412CZ £70

Which? test score 71%

This large fryer is quick to heat up and cooks evenly. Scampi was well browned and crispy, and chips were golden brown and fluffy inside. It dismantles easily and the internal parts are easy to clean, but it took five hours to cool down sufficiently to do this.

MICROWAVE

Panasonic NN-ST479S £160

Which? test score 80%

The feature-packed solo microwave comes with sensor cooking, turbo reheating and an impressive 18 automatic cooking programs. It's spacious and heats and defrosts well. The control panel has an easy-to-read digital display and clearly marked push button controls.

TOASTER

Russell Hobbs 14356 £60

Which? test score 79%

This contemporary glass two-slice toaster browns evenly and has one long slot to fit bread of different sizes. The Magimix Le Toaster scored 80% in our tests but costs twice as much, so the Russell Hobbs is much better value. On the downside, buttons are small and a bit fiddly.

KETTLE

Kenwood JKP210 £28

Which? test score 82%

This high-scoring, good-value kettle is quick to boil, easy to pour and has a good limescale filter. It has a low minimum fill of 250ml (an average mug), so you won't waste energy if you're just making one cup.

HOT WATER DISPENSER

Morphy Richards Accents One Cup 43930 £33

Which? test score 78%

This cute, colourful and compact model was half the price of our other Best Buy. It heats up and dispenses up to 300ml of hot water each time in just over 30 seconds. It's simple to set up and use.

COFFEE MACHINE

Krups Nespresso Pixie £126

Which? test score 83%

The Nespresso Pixie (available from both Krups and Magimix) is an extremely popular capsule coffee machine, and rightly so. It brews an excellent espresso and is simple to use. Stylish and compact, it's available in several colours to complement even the smallest kitchen. If you're a cappuccino fan this model won't appeal as it doesn't make milky coffees. But you can buy a model that includes an Aeroccino milk frother, for around £50 more.

TEST LAB ROUND-UP OF THE YEAR

The best home products for cleaning, plus travel, car and gardening Best Buys

Cleaning

STEAM GENERATOR IRON

Bosch TDS4570GB Ultimate Power £200

Which? test score 84%

This retro-looking steam generator creates lots of steam – emitted at high pressure – enabling it to power through the most crumpled clothes with ease.

Results are excellent and the steam, although noisy, makes ironing effortless and almost a pleasure. It has several useful features – for example a light indicates when the iron needs refilling or descaling – and steam levels increase over time, so it's likely to work better the more you use it.

STEAM IRON

Tefal FV5370 Aquaspeed £70

Which? test score 80%

In our tests, this iron achieved close to perfect crease removal on all fabrics. Easy to use, it makes lots of steam and glides with minimal effort.

VACUUM CLEANER

Miele S6220 £210

Which? test score 77%

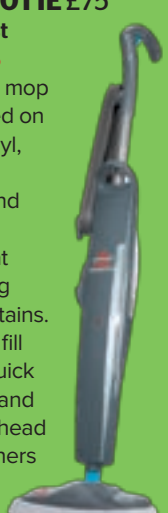
Impressive at cleaning both carpets and hard floors, this cylinder vac is powerful yet quiet. Dust pick-up is excellent. It's very manoeuvrable and gets into tricky corners and edges with ease.

STEAM MOP

Bissell 90T1E £75

Which? test score 67%

This steam mop can be used on marble, vinyl, hardwood, laminate and tiled floors and is great at removing stubborn stains. It's easy to fill and use, quick to heat up and the swivel head cleans corners and edges well.



WASHING MACHINE

Bosch WAQ28461GB £479

Which? test score 78%

This Bosch provides outstanding cleaning at a reasonable price. Rinse and spin cycles are also excellent, although the spin is very noisy. The clear control panel has lots of useful features and the machine gets four stars for water and energy efficiency.

WASHER-DRYER

AEG L75480WD £749

Which? test score 73%

If you want a washing machine and a tumble dryer, this two-in-one could save you space and money. It's rare to find a washer-dryer that performs well at both functions, but this AEG scores top marks across the board. It's quiet and easy to use, and it's also very frugal with energy and water.

TUMBLE DRYER

Bosch WTW86561GB £730

Which? test score 66%

This easy-to-use model uses a heat pump to dry clothes, which cuts running costs in half, and as such it earns our Energy Saver award. It is more costly to buy than standard dryers, but is a good investment at the right price, and can save you money in the long run. It has a few extra programs, but it's not the fastest.

DISHWASHER

Siemens SN26T296GB £649

Which? test score 78%

This freestanding dishwasher isn't cheap but it cleans brilliantly, is energy efficient and doesn't use too much water. It has a larger capacity than most dishwashers (14 place settings), making it ideal for large families. It's also pretty easy to load, with a handy cutlery drawer at the top.

Travel and outdoors

WATERPROOF JACKET

Sprayway Nyx/Eos £90

Which? test score 85%

This all-season jacket is superb at keeping out water and is very breathable. It comes with two internal and external pockets, and is great value compared to other Best Buys. It's available in a range of colours for both men (Nyx) and women (Eos).

WALKING SHOES

Berghaus Prognosis Technical Shoes £85

Which? test score 73%

These multi-function shoes are comfortable to wear, with good shock absorption and grip for different activities. They're not as water resistant as our other Best Buy – the Brasher Tour GTX – but scored better overall, cost less and are available for both men and women.

BIKE HELMET

Specialized Echelon £50

Which? test score 77%

Ideal for road riders, this helmet offers great protection in case of an accident. It's comfortable to wear, with great ventilation and visibility, and robust fastenings.

Which? not only highlights good products, but alerts you to bad ones, too. Our tests found that one helmet, the Met Camaleonte offered such poor protection that we asked Met to recall it. It refused and disputed our findings so we've passed our test results onto the local trading standards office.

SNOW SOCKS

AutoSock 645 High Performance £65

Which? test score 80%

If we get another cold winter it might be worth investing in snow socks to give your car some added grip on snow and ice. These socks can't match winter tyres for handling or braking, but are a fraction of the price and offer better traction than summer tyres.

SCRATCH REMOVERS

T-Cut Rapid Scratch Remover £6 (150ml)

Which? test score 66%

This Best Buy is suitable for any car paint and is good at removing surface scratches. It won't remove deeper scratches, but will still make them less visible. It's easy to use and the effects last. It's also one of the cheapest scratch removers we tested.

LAWNMOWER

Honda HRE370 £149

Which? test score 72%

This powerful electric mower copes well with cutting and collecting on all types of lawn – and its ability to get clippings into the grass box, even wet grass, is terrific and leads to a neat finish. The mower is easy to use and it's great that you can adjust the cutting height with a single lever.

SECATEURS

Spear & Jackson Geared Anvil Secateurs £10

Which? test score 82%

These have an anvil blade and a three-step ratchet cutting action. They cut very cleanly with minimal effort, so are great for people with weaker grip. These secateurs are well balanced and easy to handle, and they cut thin and soft stems well.

LUGGAGE

Antler New Size Zero (Medium) £165

Which? test score 90%

This lightweight four-wheeled case is our top Best Buy. It's well made, so should withstand frequent use, and is easy to pull and manoeuvre. The medium case is smaller than some other Best Buys so may be better suited for shorter trips.